NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE SPECIFICATION

WETLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

(Acre)
644

GENERAL SPECIFICATION

Procedures, technical details and other information listed below provides additional guidance for carrying out selected components of the named practice. This material is referenced from the conservation practice standard for Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management and supplements the requirements and considerations listed therein.

PURPOSE

To maintain, develop, or improve wetland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, fur-bearers, or other wetland dependent or associated flora and fauna.

MANAGEMENT

Management of wetlands for wildlife habitat should be directed toward those species that use wetlands for their life requirements. These species include ducks, geese, shorebirds, neo-tropical migratory birds, furbearers and others. In New Mexico habitat requirements for these species are year-round for furbearers such as beaver and muskrat; fall-winter food and cover for migrating ducks, geese, shorebirds and cranes; and nesting and young rearing in spring/summer for resident waterfowl and neo-tropical migratory birds. A wetland can serve double duty with water being available year-round.

Satisfactory accomplishment of the management aspect of the practice requires that the designated unit of land will have the planned habitat management applied, as needed to meet the minimum habitat requirements for the planned kinds of wildlife according to the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) for the species desired or group of species.

1. Minimum WHEG scores when wildlife is the primary use will be 0.75, 0.5 for other land uses. If the WHEG score falls below the minimum, the planner must include in the plan, practices, which will bring the score up to the minimum. See quality criteria for other land uses.

2. An adequate and reliable source of water needed to develop and maintain a wetland habitat must be available.

3. The conservation plan will indicate the species of wildlife to be benefited; the type, amount and distribution of habitat to be created or improved; and will delineate the practice location.

4. Plans will specify the provisions to manage livestock in a manner that will protect and improve wildlife habitat.

5. Plans for developing new wetland habitat will specify design features according to the following criteria:

a. All earthwork and water control structure will comply with applicable standards and specifications for the practices: dikes, levees, ponds, water control structures, ditches, pipelines, etc. as each may apply.

b. Impounded marshes will: 1) Have a minimum of 50 % of the surface area less than three feet deep at design pool elevation.

2) have a drawdown structure where water level manipulation is a planned management objective.

c. Excavated ponds and pits will: 1) Have a water depth of at least three feet over one-third of the pond area, and not more than one foot of depth over at least one-third of the pond area at design pool elevation. 2) Have spacing between ponds of no less than 200 feet. However, small pits or groups of pits to be excavated may be spaced closer than 200 feet.

WATER DEPTHS

Water depth is critical to discourage mammalian predators. Skunks, bobcats, coyotes, cougars, house cats, and most dogs are all discouraged if they are forced to swim, especially during cold weather.

Young ducks and geese need open water to escape danger after hatching when they are flightless.

planned. Adequate consideration for this excess water must be made prior to drainage.

Water quality should be good enough to avoid health problems in waterfowl and other wildlife and to encourage plant growth in the marsh. If known water quality problems are present, water should not be drained away to adjacent areas.

ARTIFICIAL STRUCTURES

Artificial man-made structures for wildlife habitat such as birdhouses are encouraged when natural sources are lacking in the local area. Natural nesting sites will be used first and if found in abundance there is no need for man-made sites. An example of this is duck nesting sites. If the marsh contains adequate shore cover and open water it is a waste of resources to build a floating nest box. If the marsh is bare ground on the edges, a floating nest box may be used until

Water control structures will be needed to maintain adequate depth and flexibility for management. Minimum depth should be 18 inches in fall/winter and 24 inches spring/summer.

Maximum depth should not exceed 5 feet. The outside perimeter should be maximum depth and as steep a slope as the soil texture will allow (1.5:1). Islands should have flatter slopes in the range of 4:1 to 7:1.

WATER CONTROL

By manipulating water levels native wetland plants, desirable to wildlife, can be grown. Undesirable weeds such as cocklebur, may also be encouraged, so adequate attention to new sprouts is imperative to eliminate them as soon as possible. Alternately flooding and drying the wetland during the growing season will encourage the growth of food plants for waterfowl.

Some form of drain structure must be planned if water level manipulations are

vegetation is established. A similar situation exists with riparian tree nesting species.

Nest boxes for neo-tropical migratory birds, wood ducks, geese and even owls can be used to increase nesting opportunities. Bats will use nest boxes near water. However, keep in mind that during nesting most species are very territorial and cannot be crowded, so that available nest boxes may not be used.

PLANTS

Plants used to vegetate wetlands should be locally adapted natives, which contribute to habitat diversity in the area. Methods of planting can be seed, transplant, sprig, cuttings or other.

Care should be taken when using annual food plots (grain crops, etc.) that are not harvested by man, that hunting not be allowed over the food plot. It is illegal to

plant food to attract waterfowl and then hunt them. It's called "baiting".

The area disturbed in the development of new habitat will be revegetated. Plans for the establishment of food or cover will specify the species of plants to be use and the practice location. Specify the methods of establishment, maintenance, and management of the plants selected. Plants will be adapted to the climate and soils of the location and will have food or cover value for wetland wildlife.

INVERTEBRATES

Invertebrate organisms such as crayfish, calms, shrimp are a very important source of protein for migrating birds especially in the late winter prior to nesting. "Seeding" the wetland with some local stock of invertebrates is desirable.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

The conservation plan will indicate the species of wildlife to be benefited, the type and extent of wetland habitat to be preserved and the treatment to be applied.

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for this site. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets. Narrative statements in the conservation plan, associated practices or other documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

In order to provide for the proper operation of the practice some provisions for maintenance must be undertaken. Some items to consider and plan for are as follows:

1. Exclusion or control of livestock.

2. Protection from uncontrolled fire.

3. Maintenance of desirable water levels through management of flooding and drying.

4. Control of undesirable plant growth if needed, through chemical, mechanical, burning, mowing or grazing.

5. Diseases can be a problem and should be quickly evaluated and dealt with promptly. Avian cholera is a devastating waterfowl problem, which should not be allowed to continue. Drying the pond or marsh will discourage waterfowl from using the area. Carcasses should be burned.

6. Eutrophication is the slow filling of any body of water by plants, sediment etc. It is a natural process and over time will cause all open water to disappear. Periodic cleaning out with tractor will be necessary and should be planned.